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# Rome Station Chief S CIA Misreported Papal Shooting

By PETER SAMUEL

The CIA station chief in Rome has been prematurely removed from his job because of the station's misreporting of the Bulgarian connection in the shooting of the Pope. CIA officers in Rome have been privately accused of spreading "black propaganda" tending to exculpate east bloc intelligence services.

The identity of the top Agency man moved out from Italy is not to be revealed but Administration officials say he was responsible for inaccurate reporting to CIA headquarters in Langley Virginia and for spreading false propaganda to journalists investigating the story.

It became clear earlier this year to the US Administration that there was overwhelming evidence of a central role by the Bulgarian secret service in the May 13 1981 assassination attempt against the Pope, after journalists and writers had produced a wealth of information on the crime implicating Bulgarian secret service officers. Italian authorities also privately told US officials it was an incontrovertible fact, whatever might be provable in a court of law, that the Bulgarian service, and hence Moscow, was behind the attempt on the life of the Pope. Vatican officials have said this for more than two years.

CIA Director William Casey received many representations over the past year to clean up his operation in Rome. Casey did not act precipitately. Indeed he has been criticized for his slowness to act, but has apparently seen the problem as part of a widespread mindset quite pervasive in the Agency that tends to give the benefit of the doubt to communist regimes, and shies away from searching investigation of communist state supported violence.

The removal of the station chief in Rome may turn out to be only the beginning—Administration officials hope—of a series of moves to reduce the influence of softliners in the Agency.

Questions are being asked about a number of officers in the CIA who constantly

produce reports exculpating East Bloc intelligence agencies from involvement in terrorism, reports which subsequently prove false.

There has been endorsement by Administration officials of the report in the *Washington Times* of a CIA "gentlemen's agreement" with the Soviet KGB. This tacit arrangement has emerged from investigation here into the CIA's steadfast refusal to accept the Bulgarian connection (and hence a key Soviet role) in the shooting of the Pope.

Italian state prosecutor, Antonio Albano is now seeking the indictment of three members of the Bulgarian secret service in connection with the attempted murder of the Pontiff, having concluded after a two year investigation that it was an East Bloc assassination conspiracy.

In his formal report Albano only mentions that "some political figure of great power" who saw the Pope's role in sustaining the Solidarity protest in Poland, decided he should be killed. In an interview obtained by an Associated Press reporter in Rome however Albano went further and said it was his "personal opinion" the Bulgarians would not have acted in such an issue without Moscow.

Major coverage has been given in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* to the Italian State Prosecutor's report pinning the Bulgarian communist secret service with responsibility for the crime.

Administration officials complain they have been plagued by misleading intelligence on the matter and they blame this on a CIA concern to protect the reputation of the KGB.

There is acute embarrassment and concern about the role of the CIA in what some describe as this "whitewashing" of its

brother spy outfit, the KGB.

Administration officials and Congressmen alike complain bitterly that the Central Intelligence Agency has performed lamentably in failing to develop intelligence on the Bulgarian connection to the Pope plot, or to face up to the broader consequences of the crime. They say that CIA briefers and written submissions on the subject have constantly stuck to the phraseology that "There is no credible evidence..." of the East Bloc secret service role in the affair, whereas Italian investigators, journalists and other western block services have produced a mass of credible evidence that has not been refuted.

According to the high source quoted by the *Washington Times*: "The CIA has an absolute fixation on the gentleman's agreement with the KGB about who you shoot and who you don't shoot."

"The old ground rules were very clear. Both sides could play around however they wanted in Africa or Asia, but there was complete immunity on persons of political importance to each side."

"I would have thought this included the Pope."

Any attempt on a major western personality would be a "momentous event" for the CIA because it would constitute a breach of the agreement between the great power secret services.

The critic continues:

"I think they (the CIA) don't want to think about it. I assume they are shaken, concerned that the old rules have shifted, worried about what this really means in the world of international intrigue."

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